

Performance Audit Report Summary

The Help America Vote Act and Related Elections Issues

Election reform efforts have had a significant impact on voting in Montana; state and county election officials can make further improvements to promote equity and effective administration in elections.

Audit Findings

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and other election reform efforts have been underway in Montana since 2002. The Legislative Audit Committee prioritized a performance audit of HAVA and related elections issues. Audit work included testing of the new statewide voter registration system (SVRS) developed by the Secretary of State's (SOS) office. We identified concerns with data integrity, including failure to remove ineligible deceased and felon voters from the rolls, and problems with unique identifier numbers. Review of SVRS access and security procedures also identified areas where the SOS office could tighten security and provide better assistance to counties. Review of system maintenance procedures identified weaknesses, which caused SVRS to experience outages on several occasions prior to the 2006 elections (Chapter II).

MT HAVA Budget

HAVA Activity	Budget (millions)
Voting Accessibility	\$5.7
SVRS	\$5.3
Education & Training	\$2.1
Voting Systems	\$1.9
Future Contingency/Interest	\$2.1
SOS Administration	\$0.3
Total	\$17.4

Source: Compiled by the Legislative Audit Division from SOS office records.

In relation to new voter identification requirements, audit work showed improvements are necessary in the use of alternative ID options in polling places. We also identified concerns with the lack of legally-mandated voter information in polling places across the state (Chapter III). We addressed the effects of new late registration provisions and found a lack of planning contributed to problems with late registrants during the 2006 elections. The SOS office will have to prepare for further changes as late registration could become more widespread in the future (Chapter IV). HAVA made changes in voting systems, including prohibition of some voting equipment. Review of Montana voting systems changes shows some votes still have a better chance of being counted

depending on location (Chapter V). Recent election reform efforts have also included introduction of provisional voting and the expansion of absentee voting (Chapter VI). Although provisional voting has been introduced without any problems, we identified concerns with disparities in the treatment of absentee ballots.

Voting accessibility for people with disabilities was a major focus of HAVA. Audit work shows Montana has made progress in making polling places more accessible. Further improvements in this area should be targeted to address remaining accessibility problems. HAVA also mandated provision of accessible voting systems in each polling place. Montana purchased and distributed accessible Automark voting systems, which we found were subject to a high rate of operational error during the November 2006 elections (Chapter VII).

The final chapter of this report addresses funding requirements for HAVA and other election reform efforts. Recent changes in elections administration will require long-term funding and some reassessment of the balance of responsibility between state and county governments. Our review of election funding issues identified opportunities for a thorough review of current funding structures (Chapter VIII).

Audit Recommendations

All audit recommendations are addressed to the SOS office and generally address improvements in internal policies and procedures, training provision for election workers, coordination/standardization between different counties, and the adoption of a more long-term management approach for certain elections issues.